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## **For Immediate Release**

### **Utah Guard Enlists the Help of a Few, Good Goats**

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CAMP WILLIAMS, Utah – When it comes to fighting wildfires, many immediately think of water or fire retardant dropped from helicopters and other aircraft, or soot-covered firefighters using hoses and foam to battle back towering blazes.

Few people, however, think of goats as a firefighting tool, but goats are exactly what the Utah National Guard is using to lessen the potential of wildfires here at Camp Williams, located near Salt Lake City.

The Utah Guard has enlisted more than 1,200 goats and sheep to consume fire fuels, such as sagebrush and oak brush, before this year's fire season, said Sean Hammond, Integrated Training Area manager, who directly oversees the animals' activities at Camp Williams.

The goats were first introduced in 1999 on an experimental basis in cooperation with Utah State University, said Hammond. Two years later during a massive wildfire that spread through the camp, the goats proved their worth.

"The goat firebreak had only been constructed a very short distance but where it was constructed, the fire stopped, even when it jumped roads and other firebreaks," said Hammond.

Fire fuels burn hotter when ignited by a wildfire, but contrary to popular belief, goats won't eat everything.

"There are certain plants that they would just have to be starved to eat," said Doug Johnson, natural resources manager for the Utah Army National Guard. "But they'll eat a lot of our heavy fuels pretty readily, like the sagebrush and the oak brush. And they do a great job dealing with those fields."

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In 2003, the goats were officially added to Camp Williams' fire prevention plan and were used to construct more firebreaks. The Utah Guard has been steadily increasing the length of those areas over the past six years and currently has about 10 miles of goat-cleared firebreaks, said Hammond.

The value of the goats' efforts was proven again in 2006, when another major wildfire broke out on the camp.

"The fire was driven by winds approaching 20 mph into twin bulldozed firebreaks," said Hammond. "The twin firebreaks held for between 10-15 minutes before the fire jumped the lines and raced uphill toward the camp's northern boundary."

At that point, pushed by nearly 40 mph winds, the blaze neared the top of the ridge when it hit the area cleared by the goats.

"Under these conditions, the fire line plowed into the goat firebreak and stopped," said Hammond. "Personnel on the ridge at the time the fire hit the goat firebreak remarked that had it not been for the goats, the fire would not have stopped at the ridgeline."

If the fire had not stopped there, said Hammond, it most likely would have continued on to nearby housing developments.

The goats have also helped clear Camp Williams of other unwanted items. In 2007, an unexploded artillery shell was found after they cleared an area along the camp's artillery impact area. Suspected to have been fired during training in the mid-1980s, the round sat unnoticed in heavy brush before the goats got to it.

"They eat (just about) everything down to stubble," said Army Lt. Col. Hank McIntire, public affairs officer for the Utah Guard. "It makes it look like a wasteland. Once the area was cleared off by the goats, the round was easily seen."

A berm was constructed around the shell for safety and an explosive ordnance disposal team destroyed the shell in place with an explosive charge. The wildfires of the previous year had come within 200 meters of the shell, said McIntire.

The success of the goats has strengthened ties with those who live near the camp, said Hammond.

And plans are underway to increase the amount of goat-built firebreaks.

Currently, a planned extension of the firebreaks is to be built along the western edge of the camp and the cost of the addition will be paid for by the Utah State Forestry and Fire Department, said Hammond.